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The Monster: From 98.6 a Novel

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There was a rose pinned to your shirt. You wore a red hat, a black suit, a black tie. Believe me, it usually happens this way: between the man on the terrace with his pipe, smoking poetry, and the lady in the front room describing her daughter's vagina, there's usually someone who's come at will, weeping yellow tears the size of gallstones and with a fishhook permanently fixed in the crook of his elbow. White sugar, white paper, the aging white heads of dandelions and children's teeth. Believe me, it sometimes never happens at all.

Because I'll return with a broken bell, a limping cow, a battered calendar that's been left out in the rain for months and years. I'll patch up your ear with sandpaper, putty, I'll wrap the pinholes in a leak-proof bag, feed honey to the hummingbirds and the bees, cover all the windows with a patchwork quilt. I'll come back one night with my swollen lantern that's now the size of an infinitesimal pea. Yes I'll return. I'll come back. Trust me.

FICTION / RONALD SUKENICK

The Monster

From 98.6, a Novel

This is their first money crisis. Ron feels they ought to have a meeting about it but one of their rules is that they don't have any meetings. It's not a rule exactly it's just not the way they do things. So what they do is they get George and drive over to the River Queen. The River Queen people are allied with The Planet Krypton in their mutual difficulties with the Earthmen. The difference is that while The Planet Krypton is always getting victimized The River Queen mostly comes out on top because they have a lot of money and the reason why they have money is that they're big dealers which is why they have difficulties with the Earthmen to begin with. The River Queen people live on a big old ferry hulk docked in a lagoon on the river near a colony of houseboats. George knows their boss lady through Altair and Betelgeuse who deal with her. This is important because to the River Queen folks there are only two kinds of people. Friends and fuzz. The boss lady is a local character named Fatima who is supposed to have

made a fortune in flesh some years back. She still deals a little in flesh on the side but mainly now it's dope. When you work for Fatty as everyone calls her you can pick up your pay in flesh dope or cash take your choice. Fatty sweeps out to meet them in a long dress a red bandanna and lots of big gold jewelry. An Everest of flesh double chins double elbows every joint doubled and dimpled with quivering fat when she hugs George hello he actually disappears for a while. Fatty is hospitable passing around some dope as they talk about work they're always working on their boat over there and you can usually pick up something to do. But two things make the boys nervous one is the presence of Fatty's enormous Great Dane Prawn with which she is said to copulate and it is true that it has a funny look on its face for a dog even though she's a nice lady. Oh well her friends always say to one another that's her trip. The dog trip. Nice Prawn give momma a kiss. The other thing that makes them nervous is two bikers with eyes like pickled onions who keep staring at them. Paul remembers seeing them before.

It turns out the only thing Fatty has is some carpentry work for George so he tells Ron and Paul to go on back and he'll hitch home tonight. When George in fact doesn't come back that night they figure he's stayed over at the River Queen. Next morning George stumbles into the settlement head crusted with blood eyes discolored one arm hanging limp. Still spitting blood he tells them all he remembers about getting a ride that drops him off at the other side of the nearby woods about getting around three fourths of the way through the woods about suddenly noticing an enormous footprint in the path and then another about five feet on and a third after another five feet a sudden rushing in the dark underbrush and that's all he knows. He thinks it was a human footprint. He's missing one of his front teeth. The money Fatty paid him he still has. When they go back of course the footprints aren't there.

That night Paul hears the motorcycles cruising in the hills. Or is that something he makes up. Or is there some other noise or not so much a noise as the feeling of a noise that he calls motorcycles because he can't call it anything else.

Feather comes often now to Al's tent to make love. She still lives with Dave. Al and Dave are developing a kind of intimate camaraderie Dave dark and bony Al blond and thick. The three of them together are quite charming. Sly jocular arm in arm. Generating a lot of energy. Just being around them makes everybody horny.

Feather has a sudden urge to hurry on with her big tapestry. She's been

working on designs ever since the beginning of the settlement and now decides to start weaving even though nothing's been completely worked out. She sets up her loom in the area of the nearly completed house that will be her studio. The manycolored yarns are scattered in hanks about the loom. She's using ten different yarns for this piece and it's going to be enormous in fact she has no idea where it will end it's completely openended. This is because she feels completely openended due to her feverish sexual relations with Al and Dave. How does it feel to be making love with two people? It feels feverishly pleasant but a little unreal that is in her calmer moments Feather feels that it can't last though in other moments she wishes that it would. Well maybe it will after all in an eccentric time who can say what aberration or mutation will suddenly become the livable norm. All these feelings and the need to make them coherent not to mention the sudden access of erotic energy are behind Feather's impulse to plunge ahead with her tapestry. She has all these feelings in her body and all these ideas about them in her head and she wants to bring the two together in the nonobjective patterns of her weaving but as the tapestry begins to take shape yarn after yarn she finds that the actual work gives her a tremendous pain in the neck. Of course it gives her a pain in the neck the neck is what's in between the head and the body.

Dave feels so changed by his new relation with Feather that he too changes his name. His new name is Goose. It has to do with this new feeling of risk he has in trusting Feather and Al so much. It's like he's really sticking his neck out but the more it sticks out the further he flies. What's so new to Goose is that oddly he's never had so much confidence in a woman before nor such sweetness in a relation with a man. When the guys kid him about his new name he barely notices he feels so nice.

George comes running out of the woods saying he's seen another footprint like the ones he saw before he got slugged but when they go back with him to see it it isn't there. Very strange.

Every now and then somebody in the area sees something black and huge sliding through the air. Something way up perfectly still sliding through the air black and so big it's impossible that it's alive yet it is. The ancient Condors live in the mountains to the east the biggest birds in the world bigger than their South American brothers there are possibly fifty of them left in these mountains and on the earth. Someone who has just seen one of these birds will grab you with pale face and glowing eyes without knowing exactly what he wants to say so what he says is I saw a Condor. What he really wants to say is something like I just saw a vision of universal death

and eternal life but of course he doesn't believe in those things as tangible realities. If he doesn't know about Condors and the apparition came at dusk with the light not so good he might make something up to relieve himself Jeez I just saw this big damn thing floating through the sky it looked like a man with wings only bigger some kind of flying giant. There are wonders here. The brown snowpeaked mountains ancient empty shimmering with dreams through blankets of heathaze. Shapes materialize out of the misty pines in the morning and evening and at night with the surf throbbing and the breeze in the pines it's hard to distinguish what you hear from what you make up. The way Paul makes up motorcycles at night if in fact he's making that up. He feels a need to make things up to fill the emptiness to fill it with themselves their dreams and their nightmares the fantastic shape of their house.

For a long time Joan wanted to have a baby but she doesn't any more. Ralph and Joan are the only couple in the settlement who are legally married. She still has the same feeling of love for Ralph as always but lately she has a lot of other feelings. She feels she wants to do her work she wants to give her time to her work not to a baby and she doesn't want to give a baby her body or her whole attention or her independence. She feels the strength of the physical bond with her husband the sheer physical bond of his touch and the touch of his body in bed every night but she knows it's a bond she's going to break. She doesn't think about it and she hasn't thought about it but it's something that she knows. Just the way she knows without thinking about it that since moving to the country her capacities have in some way increased that she's capable of things she wouldn't even have thought about before that she has new energies at her disposal not so much a new feeling of this or that as that she simply feels more. And needs more to meet what she feels. For one thing she finds she has time for everything takes an interest in everything going on around her and gets an awful lot done so that when she thinks back on her day she wonders how she had time for all she did. It's not a matter of efficiency as when she worked in an office but a kind of absorption in everything around her. And she works better than she ever has before wherever she goes she finds materials for her mirrors and constructions odds and ends of wood rusty metal bits of glass stones broken shells things of no value that she immediately puts to use in her pieces. This is why when Paul comes on her making a pie of apples picked from their trees he finds her crying. What's wrong?

Nothing it's just that I haven't thought of making this for years.

So?

It's the only recipe my mother taught me. Don't you think it's pathetic how little your parents can teach you? An immense sky watery grey. On

the horizon a mountainous black thunderhead spits lightning at the wheat-fields. The house is painted white. The first floor is hidden beneath the surface of the wheat but the second story and peaked roof the silo can be seen from fifty miles away. The father comes in big heavyfisted too tired to speak no words to say what he feels too numb to feel very much all this in Paul's head. Did you live on a farm he asks.

Yes is suddenly all she feels like saying about it.

Ralph is driving down the highway in The Log Cabin thinking about potatoes when he sees someone wearing the intergalactic embroidery of The Planet Krypton hitching on the shoulder. The Log Cabin is what they call their truck since Al and Goose rebuilt it to look like a rolling log cabin including a chimney connected to the stove they use for cooking when they're away from the settlement. Besides the kitchen there's a family room and a bunk room in the attic so anyway Ralph pulls over and picks her up it's Cassiopeia whom he recognizes because Paul brought her to the settlement once. Cassiopeia looks kind of beat and depressed Where've you been to Ralph asks her. Over at The River Queen she says.

What do you want with The River Queen Ralph doesn't dig The River Queen people much. They're too watery for him too fluxy maybe it's because Ralph is an agronomist or used to be now he does the vegetable garden and the fruit trees. Besides that they're okay with him except he thinks a lot of them are sex creeps and they tend to make him feel a little creepy. Like the way conversation turns indifferent and flat once they figure you don't want to get it on with them one way or another. And then he doesn't put down astrology Fatty is a ninth degree black belt astrologer they don't wipe their noses over there without consulting the stars and he's really kind of fond of Fatty you can't not like Fatty he just gets weary of the refrain What sign are you? What sign are you? If you really want to know I ran away from Krypton says Cassiopeia. How come?

Because Altair and Betelgeuse had a fight over me.

You don't mean they're jealous.

No we don't get jealous I don't know where their heads are at.

So how come you're going back.

I don't know Fatty talked me into turning a trick. It made me homesick.

Ralph goes back to thinking about potatoes. The reason Ralph is thinking about potatoes is that potatoes make him feel calm. Together. Rooted. And now he finds Cassiopeia disturbing. Her presence to him is like water rising behind a dam. Or a boulder on the edge of a cliff. An immense instability. Her slim body as she sits loosely on the seat next to him emanates blue throbs of sexuality that repel him and attract him while at the same time he feels her on the verge of some kind of emotional flood that could sweep

the ground from under his feet. And Ralph is right when Cassiopeia goes into high tide there's no stopping her no containing her no directing her nothing to do but hold on or get swept away.

Evelyn doesn't want anything to do with it. Screw it. If Ron's going to start with his comic shtick she's had it she's been there before. Okay she has no sense of humor she doesn't want a sense of humor. She's only a nurse she doesn't need a sense of humor. She feels the whole bit is based on some kind of evasion and she thinks it's loathsome. Already she feels Ron moving out of contact. Turning hard. Besides she knows what it leads to for Ron after the Borscht Circuit comes the sex trip if he's into a sex trip let him go over to The River Queen not screw up her relations with Helen who she likes. This is what Evelyn thinks but actually there's more to it than that. Evelyn sees everything in terms of Ron but that's only part of the picture. Ron is only venting what everybody feels everybody is off balance waves of irritation are sweeping through the settlement. The relation among Feather Goose and Tom Al has changed his name to Tom is making everybody horny and dissatisfied. There's been so much fucking going on around this place that nobody can get his work done any more and instead of satisfying them it just makes everybody hornier. A new beat a new rhythm is starting and nobody knows yet how they're going to answer it nobody knows what kind of music it will make.

Helen rides into the clearing on her stallion Lawrence. Helen makes money working as a part-time groom on neighboring ranches but that's not why she keeps a horse. Helen has a horse at the settlement because she's always had a horse and she works as a groom because she's always worked as a groom. Even during her brief marriage. Just as mailmen are now women so also brides are grooms she muses amused again with the local cowboys' reaction to her horning in on their work. Nothing like a horny cowboy for the old male cock and bull. They can't make up their minds whether to be nostalgic for the old wrangler or look to the possibility of getting laid so they tend to lapse into dull shitkicking hostility. Well like anything else it solves some problems and raises others that's the way Helen thinks about it. With George it works out all right he and Helen meet like the king and queen of two different countries allied but completely independent. Though George can ride he isn't interested in the feel of a live animal between his legs George rides the most powerful bike they build the new Mitsubishi 1300 souped up chopped down and all set to go to town. George is fascinated with the power of machines and that's all right with Helen who thinks that women are far more tuned in to animals anyway. She gets down in front of The Monster and hitches Lawrence to one of

Joan's metal sculptures Ron is helping Tom and Goose finish up the plumbing. I think she's just about ready to take us in says Ron gesturing at The Monster.

I think of it as he.

Shehe then but I feel like we're about to move in to a furnished womb speaking of wombs. He puts his arm around her Ron likes to kid her this way she assumes it's kidding Helen doesn't understand Ron at all but she likes him. How about coming out into the woods with me.

You know I can't do that Ron this is my family Helen is an orphan and it's true that she thinks of the settlement as her family. You're my brother.

What about incest.

I've tried that.

How is it.

It's nice but it leads to complications.

Ron wants to know more but he can tell that Helen is in her egg. He can tell by the absorbed expression on her face and the way her eyes seem to look out at nothing. Going Into the Egg is what they do to solve the problem of privacy in the settlement with a lot of people living in close contact. Imagine you're surrounded by a large transparent egg imagine it with great intensity and if you imagine it hard enough it becomes real. Try it it works.

They decide to have a ritual basketball game maybe that'll clear the air. How is a ritual basketball game different from a regular basketball game it isn't. It's just that they decide to call a basketball game a ritual basketball game when they feel they need one and that in fact makes it different. The men decide to call one when they feel there's something to be cleared up among them even though they don't know what it is especially when they don't know what it is. They go back to the half court they have behind the house and they choose sides by chance by coin toss. Then they just attend carefully to what happens in the game with a kind of split consciousness half in the game and half out of it like simultaneous instant replay then later on each man tries to put it back together in his head what they see with what they do. It makes for a rather intense and stately game the way people move when they're carrying too much to hold on to. The sides are Tom Goose and George against Ralph Ron and Paul. Twenty-four wins Tom passes in to George he drives in to the keyhole fakes a jump shot and passes off to Goose under the backboard instead of shooting he dribbles under the basket tosses the ball high to the opposite side of the court which is completely empty except for Tom who appears under the ball out of nowhere and takes it for an easy lay up. George passes the ball in

from midcourt Ron steals it passes to Ralph who passes back to Ron who dribbles once takes a high arching two-handed set shot on the run that can't possibly hit it swishes right in to a scattering of stunned obscenities. George is easily both the tallest and the best player among them but he sees Tom and Goose working so well together he just passes off to them feinting and holding the ball over his head in the keyhole till he sees a possible play. As soon as Tom or Goose gets the ball they lock into psychic contact with one another as they triangulate on the basket with impossible blind passes and unpredictable fastbreaking rhythms they make three consecutive baskets this way before their opponents can figure out what's happened. Then Ron gets hold of the ball again and without hesitation scores with another long high running set to general amazement. Everybody's amazed but Ron Ron knows he's in to a run that's what he calls it. When Ron is in to a run he can't do anything wrong it's this extraordinary thing that happens to him sometimes it can happen when he's playing ball or poker or betting on horses or when he's performing or writing even in social situations he doesn't know what it is or why it comes but he knows when it's happening it's a kind of power. Ron knows it but the others don't not until he gets his hands on the ball and makes another one of those long sets almost without looking then Ralph and Paul start feeding him the ball every chance next time he gets it it's a long hook shot then a push shot from the corner then another long set he can't miss George starts charging him so he can't get off any more long ones he passes under him to Ralph who sends it back to Ron for an impossible left-handed hook shot next time it's a fastbreaking lay up meanwhile Tom and Goose still working beautifully together keep their side in the game. The score is eighteen-ten Ron gets off another hook shot while falling down George slaps himself on the forehead so hard he almost knocks himself out. Next time he gets the ball he fakes to Goose past Paul guarding him and goes up against Ron jumps for the lay up getting Ron in the chin with his shoulder Ron is down. They stop the play but Ron is only dazed next time George gets the ball he does the same thing getting Ron under the eye with his elbow missing the shot Ralph gets it off the board and dribbles to halfcourt the game goes on. But now there's this thing between Ron and George where Ron is angry and concentrating on George's drive in competition instead of being absorbed by the circle of the basket and it spoils his run when Ron makes a shot he knows it's not going to go in and it doesn't go in or if it goes in it rims around the basket and by some negative magic pops out again. George is getting every rebound off the backboard and now instead of making plays takes every shot himself hitting one after another and the score is even at twenty. But then something happens with Paul Paul is guarding George and he starts reading his mind sensing every move George makes an instant before he makes

it so George starts feeding the ball to Tom and Goose but now they fumble around like a couple of clowns kicking the ball away or passing to Ron by mistake and nobody can make a basket. Everybody's taking shots they know won't hit making flashy pointless passes dribbling listlessly suddenly no one cares about the game there's no more fun in it. Ralph grabs the ball slams it against the ground starts peeling his clothes off yelling Time for a swim the others yelling stripping run after him down to the riverbank and naked leap madly into the water.

In the late afternoon after he's done with his work George often gets his board and goes surfing. If you ask George why he likes surfing so much he gets a thoughtful look on his face strokes his blond beard squints gazing into emptiness and after a while says Guess I just like it.

Here's what the women think about Feather having two lovers. Helen's seen everything she doesn't think about it. Besides she's done that Helen's done everything she knows how it is. Evelyn has her feet on the ground she thinks it's silly. She can't see it. Joan is curious. She disapproves. She wonders what it's like. She's jealous. It turns her on.

Here's one of Evelyn's exercises. First hold your finger in front of your nose and keep your eyes focussed on it. Then move your head from side to side keeping your eyes focussed on it. Then close your eyes while you move your head from side to side keeping your eyes focussed on it. Then take your finger away with your eyes closed while you move your head from side to side keeping your eyes focussed on it. Now open your eyes with the finger away while you move your head from side to side keeping your eyes focussed on it. Even though it isn't there. Or is it?

Hey says Ralph.

Hey is for horses says Joan.

Meaning what.

Meaning you know what my name is glares Joan. Ralph gazes back at her as if she were some kind of lunatic.

Don't look at me as if I'm a lunatic says Joan. I just wanted to know if you want to go for a walk says Ralph. It's plain to Ralph that Joan's got something against him lately but he can't find out what. At the same time she's become more and more demanding but he can't figure out what it is she wants. But this is precisely where Joan is at she feels like she has a grudge against Ralph but at bottom she doesn't really know for what nor does she know what it is she wants from him. Or even whether it's something he can give her. Ralph hopes that moving from the cramped some-

times irritating confines of the tent into the house will help the situation but it won't. One look at Joan's sullen face and he can't help withdrawing into silent anger himself. When Feather comes over to the front of their tent where they're sitting on the ground these are the vibes she picks up the dead look on Joan's face and the stubborn hunched posture of Ralph's shoulders. Ordinarily Ralph is shaped pretty much like a potato anyway but when he's feeling good he radiates a kind of earthy warmth and Joan can be as mobile as a poplar blowing in the wind. Without saying anything she sits down between them and grabs each by the hand. Joan and Ralph incapable of any flow of feeling between one another respond to Feather Ralph with a guarded greeting Joan with a smile. This is what Tom and Goose call Making the Sun Come Out she says.

How's the tapestry coming asks Ralph.

I think it's lovely but it's the hardest thing I've ever done. That's why I came over here I have just a terrible pain in my neck from working on it. Do you think one of you could rub it a little?

Sure says Joan Feather lies down her face in Joan's lap Joan suddenly all good nature massaging and smiling Here? More to the side? Ralph goes over to the vegetable garden.

Ron is weeding along the row of celery. How's it going asks Ralph.

Noi voh hunza schnecken.

What's that Chinese?

It's a patois. I learned it in Mexico. There's a small area on the coast of Yucatan in the jungle where an alien tribe speaks a language no one understands some people say they don't understand it themselves. These people are dark but not Indian no one knows where they came from or when they got there. The local natives call them Turks. They work as itinerant merchants and they run restaurants. They're also famous for being good dentists. The Indians hate them because they're rich but they're also afraid of them because of their language which is like a secret code and which they believe has magical properties. The Turks know this and play it to the hilt. It's entirely possible that they just use this gibberish to impress the Indians and that actually their only real language is Spanish they're real smart. When they start jabbering at one another you don't know whether they're laying a curse on you or saying let's cut his balls off or just please pass the salt. Anyway I picked up a few phrases when I was there. Vash znagel p'tooi.

What's that mean?

I don't know.

They work down the row together. In his previous life Ralph managed to crossbreed celery with endive producing that very white variety of cel-

ery with the extralarge heart that you're now just beginning to see in your supermarket. Ralph calls it potato celery. That's the kind of celery they grow in their garden. It's because of potato celery that Ralph is able to contribute a small income to the settlement. Do you know that celery originally comes from Iceland says Ralph.

Really.

Yeah. It was brought from there to Europe. By the Vikings.

The broadtail are running and George and Paul tack out of the cove on *The Wave*. *The Wave* is the white sloop George brought along from his previous life. The sea is calm except for a gentle swell sky blue light wind blowing off the coast. George handles the tiller and mainsheet Paul the jib outside the cove they set a course downwind and take their clothes off. Paul basks on the foredeck given up to the slapslush of the bow cutting water the bob and heel of the boat the radiance of the sun on his body. They're out after broadtail and the whales are migrating along the coast. If they see a spout George will drop everything to chase it it's the kind of thing George likes to do. Paul worries a little about getting too close to one of those monsters there are stories of small boats being wrecked. George doesn't worry he never worries he just does Paul looks back at George his blue eyes sweeping the seascape. George has sky in his head thinks Paul.

It's not animals. Animals don't break windows and set fires. Or even slash tents. Every time it happens George looks carefully for footprints he never finds any. Once he goes off into the woods with his hunting rifle. Paul dreams motorcycle noise. Ralph is for building a fence but they can't decide.

They're ready to move into The Monster the way they do it is for a whole day everyone fasts and goes into his egg. The tents are down and everything is set for the potlatch which they hold that evening in the patio under the redwood around the fire. Everyone stays in his egg until they all join hands in the larger egg of the Big O. Ralph has a sense of imminence of new birth of a change beyond his doing. After all that's why you create a monster to do things you can't do. Isn't it? And then it does them to you. The omming and the energy go around when the egg is complete full of feeling and life then they break it. They break it with Evelyn's exercise Imagine a rose in front of your nose. Close your eyes keeping the rose in front of your nose. With your eyes closed see the color of the rose in front of your nose. With your eyes closed seeing its color smell the rose in front of your nose. Smelling the rose and seeing its color open your eyes and look at the rose in front of your nose. Take it in your left hand and pass it to your left taking in

your right hand the one from the right holding the rose in front of your nose. Smell the smell and see the color of the rose in front of your nose. Smelling its smell and seeing its color make believe it isn't there the rose in front of your nose. Making believe it isn't there watch it disappear as you unimage the rose in front of your nose. And now it isn't there what isn't there the rose in front of your nose.

To the accompaniment of Goose on the guitar Ron sings an interpretation of his song Famished crowbars rape the lute then they begin the ritual meal of venison stew baked squam wheat berry bread tomatoes cress and homemade peach icecream washed down with the sacral asparagus wine. And as they eat George begins to tell a story a story he knows from the local Indians some of them still live in the woods. It seems that in the time of the animals before men were created a god called Flows-with-the-streaming-clouds was lonely and wanted somebody to talk to. So he created animals who could talk and these animals were something like bears and something like men. They could talk but not through their mouths through their navels they used their mouths for other things like eating and fighting and reproduction. Also they couldn't talk about the kinds of things we talk about because their voices weren't connected with their brains they were connected with their bodies and instead of coming through the windpipe came through the intestines. So they could only talk about what they felt they couldn't talk about what they thought. It's not that they didn't have heads on their shoulders they did but they used them for other things besides thinking like seeing hearing smelling tasting and butting. What they didn't have was necks. But then they didn't need them because they didn't have any voice box. It's not as if they were stupid they weren't stupid just different. Now these Sasquatch as the Indians call them were very happy. Their words were growls squeaks farts gargles clicks and chuckles and they were always jabbering to one another. They were something like bears who have just learned how to play the piano. The only trouble was they couldn't learn how to talk to the gods and this made Flows-with-the-streaming-clouds very angry. So he sent the Condors after them and the Condors carried them off by their navels and shook them till their guts ripped and their heads were nearly torn from their bodies and when the Condors were through with them their voices came out their mouths and they were men. And that's why men have necks because after the Condors they needed something to keep their heads connected with their bodies. But though men were now able to learn the speech of the gods they always remembered the pain that gift caused them and they weren't happy. And so it turned out that the gods didn't want to talk to them anyway because it was such a down. So Flows-with-the-streaming-clouds ended up as lonely as he was to begin with. And

the Indians say there are still some Sasquatch left still hiding from the Condors and sometimes they come out at night but that they're very bitter after all that's happened. Anthropologists consider this a very old myth that may actually represent an unknown stage in the evolution from animal to human that's why they like to dig around here. Some inconceivably subhuman but superanimal species preceding *Pithecanthropus Erectus* that might in fact have lived at the same time as the Condors which are very ancient. Some species intelligent enough to be free but too dumb to be unhappy.

The Missing Lunk says Ron.

There's an awful lot of energy flowing through the potlatch this time Ralph wonders if anybody else can feel it. Unstable energy roiling around making Ralph think of thunderclouds. Feather sitting between him and Joan catches both their hands and starts Making the Sun Come Out though it seems to come out mostly between her and Joan smiling at one another. Ralph starts thinking about potatoes. Ron gets up. Though this settlement was originally my idea as you know I've long since stopped being its creator he says. Instead we all invent it as we live it. And in very real ways it begins to invent us in return. And now as we move into this big poppamomma that we've made I feel a change of heart coming on.

For better or for worse asks Evelyn.

I don't know but a change. And I want to say that whatever happens from now on there isn't anybody here who I don't like I won't use the word love because it's too crapped up there isn't one of you motherfuckers or fathersuckers who I don't like a lot. And because I feel this change coming on in myself especially what I want to destroy in this potlatch is my name for a name that's more appropriate to the way I feel. And the way I feel is cloudy so from now on that's my name. Cloud. Thank you brothers and sisters.

And then everybody starts changing names. Evelyn changes to Eucalyptus because Cloud's changes make her feel heavy and left behind. Paul becomes Wind because he wants to change. Joan changes to Valley because she needs a mask. Helen becomes Dawn because she feels like a new kind of person. George changes to Lance and Ralph stays Ralph because he feels stubborn. Then Tom Goose and Feather change to Branch Bud and Blossom.

When Cassiopeia wanders into the settlement she can't find any signs of activity though it's well toward noon so she drifts on into The Monster. Half nude bodies are strewn on mats on mattresses on the floor on pieces of furniture in pairs and larger clumps. Under the redwood in the patio Valley

and Blossom are hugging and kissing. Bud and Branch are off at the creek for a dip. Far out says Cassiopeia Valley jumps up.

That's cool says Cassiopeia. What's going on here.

We had a potlatch last night says Blossom.

That musta bin some potlatch.

What happened was we all became brothers and sisters. How are things at Krypton.

It's not Krypton any more they changed the name.

To what.

Golgotha they've all become Jesus creeps. Last night Betelgeuse converted he was the last holdout. Him and me. We've all been fighting about it for weeks.

So where does that leave you.

Out.

Where will you go.

I was thinking of heading over to The River Queen.

You don't think you'll go back.

Krypton's had it man. It's a dead planet. Jesus kills.

Nobody can be very exact about the potlatch it's all that asparagus wine. Everyone remembers having a pile. A pile is when they all crawl together in a heap on the floor everybody hugging everybody else this is nothing new. What's new is this time everybody is naked and everybody is supposed to keep his eyes closed. After that everyone's version gets a little murky. A big pulsing pile of naked loving flesh everybody can agree on that. A lot of giggling. A lot of affection. Suddenly quiet and a serious mood. Then for some people it was sexy for some just affectionate a lot of people say it was all anonymous but who knows who really kept his eyes closed and who was peeking. Two people were holding my tits one was a girl says Dawn. I was hugging a naked man I can't get over that says Wind. I know I fucked somebody says Blossom. It's like being babies says Eucalyptus. It made me feel so happy says Bud. They try to reconstruct it but it's like trying to reconstruct a snowstorm. The wind was in the eucalyptus. A branch was growing in the valley. A lance nipped a blossom in the bud and rosy-fingered dawn burned through the clouds. And some time during the night a high wind swept through the valley and wandered sighing into the pines.